Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

POVERTY BAROMETER

September 2004

SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

Some children miss out on much more than just summer camp

Summer vacation is an exciting time for children: no school, warm weather, and fun activities to occupy their days. Summer is also an important time to participate in enriching learning activities that lead to academic success and success in later life. Unfortunately, not all children benefit from their summer break and not all children return to school in September where they left off.

It is well known that children from families with low income tend to fare worse in terms of health, education, and earnings over the course of their lives. Research shows that these children start school less ready to learn, have lower rates of staying in school, and fare worse academically than their higher income peers.[1]

What is **less known** is that these **inequities in educational outcomes do not start and end with a child's entry into kindergarten**. More and more research is showing that children from families with low income start *each* school year in September further behind their peers as a result of summer learning loss.

What is Summer Learning Loss?

Summer learning loss, also known as "summer effect" or "summer slide", occurs when children forget a significant amount of the previous year's learning during long holidays, causing them to fall behind in their academic performance year after year.[2,3]

While all children may experience some losses in learning over the summer months, particularly in mathematics, research shows that children from low-income families experience greater summer learning losses than children from families with higher income.[6]

A Canadian poll of teachers found that 77% of those who teach kindergarten to grade 6 reported that students typically returned to school either below or at the same level as when they left.[5]

Canadian and American studies have found that students generally score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer than they do at the beginning of summer.[4] As a result, when school starts again in September, teachers often have to do an extensive review before they can move ahead.[5]

During the school year, children from families with low income show similar progress in reading scores as those from middle and higher income families. But, in the summer, on average, middle-income students improve in reading ability, while children from low income families are at risk of losing ground.[4,7,8]

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[1] Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (2004). *How Do Educational Outcomes Vary With Socio-Economic Status? Key Findings from the Manitoba Child Health Atlas 2004*. Department of Community Health Sciences Faculty of Medicine, University of Manitoba.

[2] Kerry, Trevor and Davies, Brent (1998). Summer Learning Loss: The evidence and a possible solution. *Support for Learning*, vol. 13, no. 3.

[3] Bents, Gerd J. (2002). *Examining the Effects of Year Round Education: A Literature Review*. The Graduate School University of Wisconsin-Stout. Retrieved from: http://www.uwstout.edu/lib/thesis/2002/2002bentsg.pdf

[4] Fairchild, Ronald A. and Boulay, Matthew (2002). *What if Summer Learning Loss Were an Education Policy Priority?* Presentation for the 24th Annual APPAM Research Conference: Asking What if... Assessing the Public Policy and Management Implications of Social Science Research", November 9th, 2003. Retrieved from: http://www.summerlearning.org/resources/docs/APPAM%207.pdf

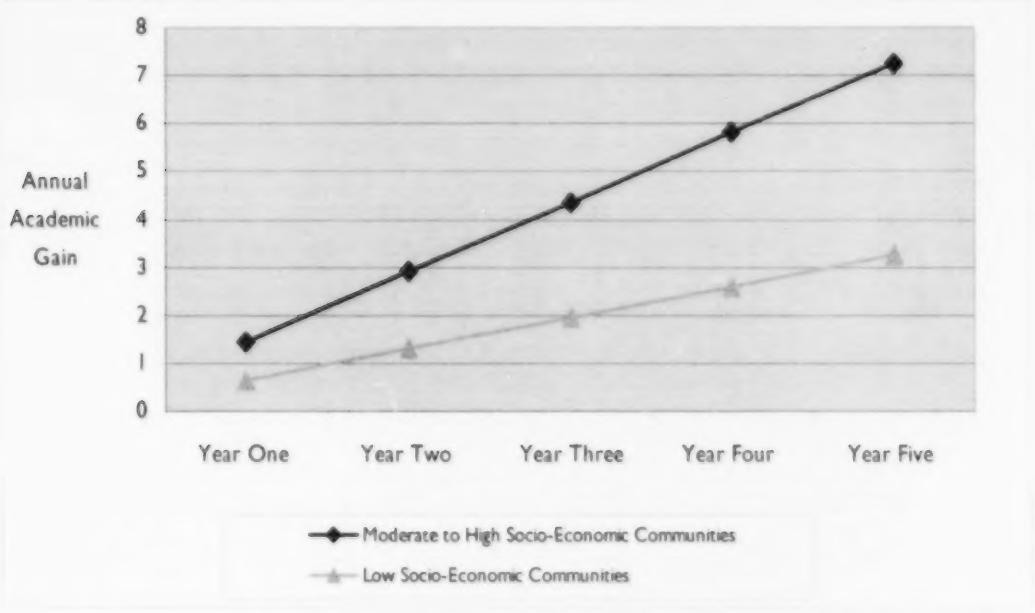
How much do children living in poverty lose?

Over time, the effect of losing reading skills during the summer results in cumulative losses for children from low income families. This seems to be particularly true throughout the elementary school years.[4,7,8]

The graph below is based on data from a **Calgary elementary school** and illustrates the startling effects of summer learning loss on children's academic performance.[9]

The study compared children's reading assessment scores achieved in June and August. The study found that children from moderate to high socio economic communities gained .3—.4 years over the summer months while students from low income families lost .3—.4 years. As the graph shows, over the course of five years, children from low income communities would gain only 3.25 years of learning compared to 7.25 years gained by those from higher socio economic communities.

Figure 1: Cumulative Effects of Summer Learning Loss



Source: Data from Patrick Airlie Elementary, Newsletter #14, June, 2001.

As can be seen, summer learning loss has long term effects on children and contributes to the learning gap between higher income and lower income children.

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[4] Dolman, Heather (March 2004). *The St. Albert Public Library Summer Reading Game: Do Children's Reading Levels Change over the Course of the Game?* School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta. Retrieved from: http://www.slis.ualberta.ca/cap04/heather/Introduction.htm#Literature

[5] The John Hopkins University's Center for Summer Learning.

[7] Krueger, Alan B. "Economic Scene: Vouchers for Summer School Could Help Halt the Learning Slide," *New York Times*, August 17, 2000. Retrieved from: National Center for Policy Analysis at www.ncpa.org/pi/edu/pd 081700b.html

[8] Sharp, Caroline (March 2000). *The Learning Benefits of Restructuring the School Year: What is the Evidence?*

[9] Patrick Airlie Elementary, Newsletter #14, June, 2001.

[10] Manitoba Council on Child Nutrition (2001). *Food and Nutrition in Manitoba Schools: Survey Report, 2001.*

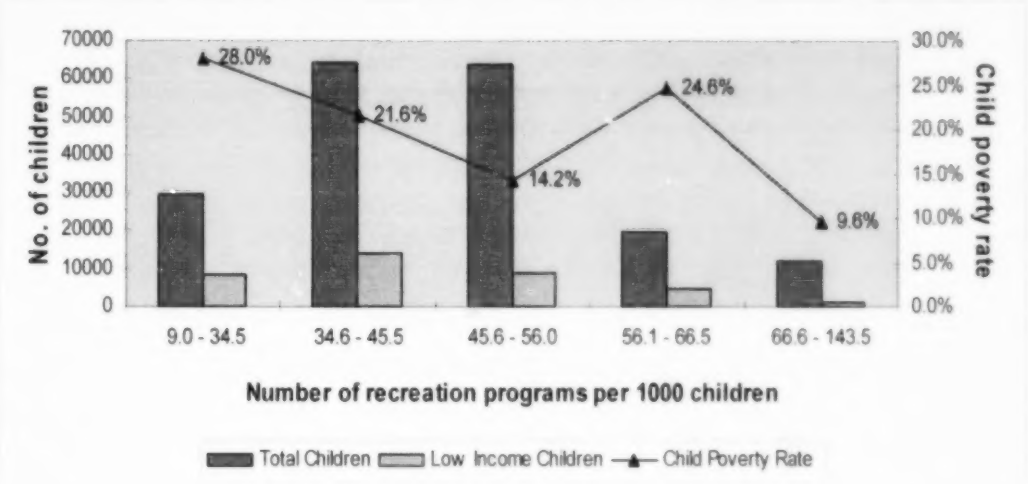
Why do some children lose out on learning over the summer?

Children living in poverty lose out over the summer because they have less of an opportunity to participate in learning activities than their higher income peers. The ability to participate in recreational programming that is enriching and educational depends very much on where children live and whether they can afford to pay for it.

Many neighbourhoods don't have **the needed resources for children** to participate. The graph below shows that the Winnipeg areas with the highest combined average child poverty rate are also the areas with the fewest recreation programs per 1000 kids while the area with the lowest child poverty rate has the greatest number of recreation programs.

Children from low income families are the least able to pay for recreation and to travel to other neighbourhoods to attend them. Families who are struggling on limited budgets often have to give up the **"luxury"** of recreational and learning activities to be able to meet their basic needs of food and housing.

Figure 2: Number of Recreation Programs and Child Poverty Rates in Winnipeg



Source: Calculations based on Recreation Map courtesy of the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Manitoba, 2004. Child Poverty data obtained from "An Analysis of Child Poverty in Winnipeg" by D. Lezubski (2004), draft

Children need food to learn...how do they get their nutritious food in the summer?

Nutrition plays an important role in children's learning throughout the year. Children lose out on learning over the summer because they don't have the same level of access to nutritious food as they do during the school year.

In 2002/2003, Winnipeg Harvest's monthly average for families using the food bank increased from 4,036.2 during the winter months to 4,889.2 in the summer.

Many children in Manitoba rely on school food programs to get a nutritious meal during the school year. It is estimated that over 3000 students receive their breakfast at school. Almost half of all Manitoba school divisions have breakfast programs, half of which are located in Winnipeg schools, with the majority in inner city and core areas.[10]

When school is out for the summer, many children are left without a reliable food source.

WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

All young people experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer.

On average, students lose approximately 2.6 months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months.

Low income children and youth experience greater summer learning losses than their higher income peers.

Summer learning loss contributes to the achievement gap in reading performance between lower and higher income children and youth.

Children who rely on school food programs do not have the same level of access to nutritious food during the summer as they do during the school year.

Source: Primer on Summer Learning Loss: The John Hopkins University's Center for Summer Learning

Children don't have to lose — What can be done?

Summer should be a time for all kids to have fun while taking part in activities that will contribute to their learning and school readiness. Going to the library, clubs, summer camps, and taking part in classes such as theatre and music over the summer gives some children a big advantage. Kids who can do more continue to do more throughout their childhood and youth. Children need the opportunity to participate year round in enriching activities that contribute to academic learning and success in later life. A focus on early prevention and meeting basic needs will provide all children with the opportunity to maximize their potential.

Early Prevention

- Ensure year round access to affordable nutritious food throughout Manitoba.
- Improve programs to encourage early learning and promote healthy development, such as child care.
- Ensure access to enriching activities that promote learning such as library reading programs.
- Improve recreational facilities and programming, particularly in areas with high rates of child poverty.

Meeting Basic Needs

- Increase the supply of low income housing and increase the shelter allowance of Employment and Income Assistance.
- Extend health benefits (including dental care, eye care, etc.) to low wage workers and their families.
- Increase the minimum wage and income assistance rates to a living wage and index them.
- Increase the Child Related Income Support Program benefit and raise eligibility levels.

This Barometer was developed by the Campaign 2000 Continues Steering Committee.

Poverty Barometer is an occasional publication of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

The mission of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg is to provide action-oriented leadership in social planning and effecting social policy changes.

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